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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses challenges and opportunities facing Muslims in the United States, where between 5 to 8 million Muslims live (the fastest growing religion in the country). American Muslims face many challenges, and the public has little understanding of the teachings and practice of Islam. Muslims are prone to negative stereotypes, ethnic profiling, and attacks equating Islam with terrorism and radicalism. U.S. Muslims reflect a rich mosaic of ethnic, racial, linguistic, tribal, and national identities. However, despite multi-racial, multi-ethnic, and multifaceted differences, they are often portrayed as a homogenous group. Americans must look beyond ethnic stereotypes and gain a greater appreciation of Muslim diversity. Muslims have to define what it means to be an American Muslim in the 21st century, dealing with such issues as cultural isolation and women's rights. Many African Americans have embraced mainstream Islam, though they feel a sense of exclusion from the immigrant Muslim community. As Muslims move from the margins to the mainstream of American society, they encounter "Islamaphobia," often exacerbated by the media. Multi-faith conversations can help overcome stereotypes and build true acceptance. (SM)

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Carnegie Challenge

Muslims in America: Identity, Diversity and the Challenge of Understanding

by Sam Afridi

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Ultimately, America's answer to the intolerant man is diversity, the very diversity which our heritage of religious freedom has inspired.

—Robert F. Kennedy

Throughout his life, Andrew Carnegie was deeply committed to the belief that knowledge and understanding were the essential underpinnings of any society that claimed the ideal of tolerance and aspired to be part of a world hallowed by peace. Carnegie Corporation of New York has always sought to carry forward its founder's conviction by making it an underlying theme of all its work with grantees, policymakers, civic and government leaders and, of course, with the public.

It was in this spirit that in 1998 the Corporation convened a meeting on Islam, with the intent of developing a better understanding of the growing impact that this great religion was having on the nation and the world. With a renewed sense of urgency, in June 2001, we held another forum that brought together important voices from the many communities that practice the Muslim faith in America to discuss the challenges and opportunities facing us as the United States becomes a nation shaped not only by its Judeo-Christian traditions, but by Islamic tenets as well. This "Carnegie Challenge" paper on Muslims in America was born of that meeting; it was commissioned in order to share what we learned with a wider American and international audience and carries our hope that with understanding comes tolerance and a turning away from discrimination against any man or women because of what country they come from or what religion they practice.

In light of current events, this paper carries messages that are even more of the moment: that Islam is not a monolithic religion, but, like its practitioners, has many faces and different ethnic identities; that it is a faith that celebrates peace and honors diversity; and that it, too, values knowledge and understanding as a fundamental principle of both our spiritual and secular lives. It is our hope that in this new century, the words on these pages will help our nation and our fellow citizens begin a new dialogue about Islam in America that now concerns us all.

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One out of five people around the world are members of the Islamic faith. Predominately Muslim nations stretch from Bosnia to Bangladesh to Nigeria to Indonesia (the largest Muslim nation). If one wants to see the wide interplay and dizzying range of Muslim cultures, experts suggest two places. One is the holy city of Mecca, where Muslim pilgrims gather from every corner of the globe to fulfill a sacred duty. The other is the United States. It has been said that the United States today has the most ethnically diverse community of Muslims anywhere.

Although statistics are tenuous, it is estimated that between five and eight million Muslims now make America their home. While the precise figures remain elusive, there is no dispute that the numbers are on the rise. Today, Islam is the fastest growing religion in the United States and is on the verge of becoming the country's second largest religion.

Our nation's Muslim community is finding a place in 21st century America. Following the path of earlier immigrant groups, Muslims in America are putting down roots and becoming socially, politically and organizationally engaged. The community is becoming more visible and making headway in its effort to move into the mainstream. We can see it in the rising number of mosques, Islamic centers and schools in every part of the nation. We can hear it in the words of politicians who routinely speak of "churches, synagogues and mosques." We can experience it as American Muslims rise in the ranks of medicine, engineering and academia. Muslim chaplains now serve in the Armed Forces. The White House celebrates Ramadan. American Muslims are coming of age and emerging as a vibrant part of our society's fabric and vital contributors to our nation's daily life.

Despite growth and significant progress, American Muslims are faced with a variety of challenges as they navigate a course towards Americanization. The general public still has little understanding of the teachings and practice of Islam.

Muslims are prone to vicious stereotypes, negative public imagery, insidious profiling and attacks that equate Islam with terrorism and radicalism. Hate crimes targeting American Muslims are not uncommon. As it struggles for acceptance and understanding, the American Muslim community routinely faces those who question their status and view them with distrust. For many, Muslims remain "the other"—the outsider, the enemy, the threat.

Fostering a better understanding of Islam is not simply a challenge for Muslims, but a challenge for all Americans. Islam, after all, can no longer be considered a non-Western religion and Muslims are no longer "them." Muslims are "us." The Muslim community is here to stay—their future is in America. As such, it is vital that we as a nation seek a more balanced understanding of the complexities, challenges and opportunities inherent in the emergence of the American Muslim community. To the extent that we can gain greater awareness and confront these issues, their participation

will grow and democratic institutions will be strengthened. On the other hand, if American Muslims are neglected or misunderstood, our society as a whole will lose out.

As Vartan Gregorian, president of Carnegie Corporation of New York, has noted: "As viable Muslim communities evolve, our understanding of Islam in all its facets will be important for the harmony of our democracy. Islam is one of the three prophetic religions that, along with Judaism and Christianity, have a common God and Abraham at the core of their beliefs. To understand these faiths and their cultures and civilizations is essential if we are to continue to adhere to our tradition of religious tolerance, a tolerance that one hopes will be based on more than law alone."

The United States offers a unique laboratory for this kind of understanding. The quest for greater awareness and knowledge can also help our country advance in its mission to set an example for the rest of the world by moving beyond tolerance towards accepting and even celebrating racial, ethnic or religious differences. For all these reasons, it is increasingly vital for Americans to develop a better understanding of Islam and for Muslims to become more fully a part of the structures of American democracy and civil society.

How do we facilitate this transition? How do we, as a society, achieve a greater understanding of the richness of the Islamic experience and the variety of the American Muslim community? We can begin by examining where the community stands today—how it is thinking about its own issues—and how it is engaging the larger society.

Identity, Diversity and the Quest for Unity

Muslims in the United States reflect the diversity of the Islamic world and the diversity that is America. American Muslims represent a rich mosaic of ethnic, racial, linguistic, tribal and national identities that stretch from the Middle East to South Asia to Africa and beyond. The community includes immigrants with roots in more than 50 nations across the globe.

Recent immigrants make up the largest segment of the American Muslim community. Still, the story of Islam in America does not begin with immigrants. The second largest group of American Muslims includes those who are now in their third and fourth generation as well as a large group of converts, the majority of whom are of African-American descent. According to reliable estimates, about one-third of America's Muslim population is African American.

As the American Muslim population grows, so, too, does the number of Islamic Centers and mosques. One recent study found that the number of mosques has increased 25 percent in the last six years to more than 1,200 spread throughout the American landscape.[1]

Yvonne Haddad, professor of the history of Islam and Christian-Muslim relations at Georgetown University, observes that, "While Arabic is the language of the Qu'ran* and prayer and offers a common bond among Muslims, it is simply not the language of communication in the mosque. Even Arabs at times find it difficult to communicate with other Arabs who speak a different dialect. For the majority of mosques, English is the language of the sermon and of conducting business."[2]

While American Muslims may share a common language, the community does not speak with a common voice. Just as Judaism, for example, is composed of branches that range from Orthodox to Conservative to Reform, the beliefs and traditions of American Muslims do not fit neatly into one box. The majority of American Muslims are of the Sunni tradition but every Islamic sect is represented in the U.S., including Shi'ites and Sufis (adherents of a mystical form of Islam). Even within these traditions, there are a multitude of perspectives and a range of interpretations. Islam means different things to different people.

Jane Smith, professor of Islamic studies and co-director of the Macdonald Center for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations at Hartford Seminary, illustrates the diversity and the divide when she notes: "Immigrants have squabbled over differences in culture and custom . . . Blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, and others struggle to find their identity both under the greater umbrella of American Islam and also specifically as members of their respective racial-ethnic groupings. African Americans who are followers of (mainstream Islam) are unhappy that Louis Farrakhan's Nation of Islam—which they consider to be dangerously heterodox—continues to get so much publicity in the American press." [3]

Monolithic Myth

Despite multi-racial, multi-ethnic and multi-faceted differences and tensions throughout the community, American Muslims are often portrayed as a homogenous bloc. Some simply fail to acknowledge the community's diversity and instead view the population as a unified force, without dissension or distinction. And Dr. Shireen Hunter of the Center for Strategic and Advanced International Studies has observed: "Often, perhaps for political reasons—whether it's on the community's part or another group's part—there is a tendency to show Islam in America as a monolith." [4]

In order to increase understanding of the American Muslim community, Americans as a whole must be challenged to look beyond common stereotypes and gain a greater appreciation for the diversity inherent in the Muslim population of this country.

But the inter-racial, inter-ethnic heritage of American Muslims also poses unique challenges to the community itself. Many Muslim immigrants, for example, have never experienced living among different Muslims. Now they find themselves having left majority status behind in their homeland to become a minority in a non-Muslim land. How

* This paper uses the more phonetically accurate spelling "Qu'ran" (rather than "Koran") unless it was spelled differently in a quoted publication.

do these factors affect the central questions of assimilation and integration and the quest for community and identity?

Islam places a high value on building a community, an *ummah*, which is based on the ideal of equality among all believers. John Esposito, professor of religion and international affairs and islamic studies and founding director of the Georgetown Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, notes this is a particularly vexing challenge in the United States. "Despite the shared beliefs and rituals that unite Muslims, the transnational unity of Islam disintegrates in the face of ethnic, linguistic and nationalist differences and conflicts."[5]

Issues of identity and ethnically bound political agendas also hinder American Muslims as they seek to move forward on a common set of ideas and issues that would strengthen the community at large.

Mohommed A. Muqtedar Khan, assistant professor of political science at Adrian College in Michigan, notes that too many American Muslims "concentrate…on the politics of their native countries, which then becomes the source for drawing narrower boundaries…far from being unified as an American-Muslim community that seeks to establish itself, American Muslims are allowing the identity politics of the Muslim world to fragment them into various sectarian groups."[6]

Smith, of Hartford Seminary, adds: "Muslims orient their communities not only to the commonality of Islam but also and often to the particularity of national and ethnic identities…the search for an American *ummah* distinct from the racial-ethnic identities that have often served to divide and separate rather than unify is high on the agenda of many Muslims today and is particularly important to the youth who will be the new leaders of this community." [7]

This search for unity amidst diversity is, of course, a quintessential American quest. Today, it could be said that American Muslims are undertaking their own unique journey to forge "*e pluribus ummah.*"

Identity Challenge

As Muslims work to strengthen the bonds of community, the challenge of defining what it means to be an American Muslim in the 21st century is also at the forefront.

Smith speaks to this challenge. "What is Islam?" she asks. "For American Muslims, it means many different things, although the immediate answer is that it consists of the revelation of the Qu'ran, the experiences of its Prophet, and its requirements of faith and practice. This is Islam in its essential meaning. However, the many individuals who over the centuries have called themselves Muslim have shaped and developed Islam as a living faith. In the same way, the decisions American Muslims make about how to understand and practice the faith in a Western context will significantly define Islam in the 21st century."[8]

American Muslims are grappling with these issues. Some believe the answer is isolation from all non-Muslims. Others either shroud their identity or abandon the religion altogether. However, as Smith observes: "Neither isolation nor absorption is generally seen as a goal in the conversations among Muslims who are searching for guidelines and principles that can speak to the majority of the members of the complex body that is American Islam . . . A major task for Muslims, many believe, is to clarify what matters are flexible and may be reinterpreted in the Western context and what issues are so clearly part of God's design for human life and response that they can't be renegotiated."[9]

Many Muslims, for example, are quick to point out that Islam places a high status on the role of women. As Smith notes, "The Qu'ran is cited as being fully egalitarian in its treatment of men and women . . . Muslims generally insist that this equality represents a great improvement over the circumstance of women before Islam and that the Qu'ran is a remarkably equitable document in comparison with the sacred scriptures of other religious traditions."[10]

But how will equal rights and responsibilities for Muslim women be defined in a 21st century American context? Increasingly, American Muslim women are finding ways to make it work. In 1996, the *Dallas Morning News* reported: "Muslim women are forming national groups to provide them with a platform and an organized voice. They're . . . writing papers and booklets . . . They're teaching Islamic Women's Studies at universities . . . starting battered women's shelters and opening a home for elderly Muslim women . . . A few are even gingerly calling themselves feminists as they scrutinize the Koran and rediscover it as a scripture that liberates women . . . Most say that they deeply respect their conservative sisters who follow the traditional Muslim way . . . As [one young corporate lawyer] said, 'You have to take your surroundings into account when you practice your faith . . . You don't have to do everything in technical compliance. The questions is: 'What is your intent?'"[11]

More recently, in 2001, the *Boston Globe* noted that, by redefining their role in culture and society, American Muslim women may have an impact on Muslims throughout the world. As the paper reports: "'Unfortunately, the way Islam is practiced currently in some countries is not ideal,' said [one Massachusetts woman]. 'A lot of countries are looking to see how we practice it here, and we have the potential to be a really strong role model for men and women in other countries.' But there remain issues for women in Islam, as in every major world faith. Some are critical of traditional Islamic inheritance laws, which give short shrift to women, and some balk at traditional Islamic dress, which requires women to cover their hair and wear loose, enveloping garments."[12]

Further cultural challenges continue to arise. How will other social and family issues be addressed? As children grow older, how will fami-

lies confront the questions of dress, dating and intermarriage? Or the choice between public education and private Islamic education? In a larger sense, how does one become part of the fabric of society without losing one's identity?

The new generation of American-born Muslims is helping to lead the way by forcing questions and forging answers that are different and new. Khan, of Adrian College, puts it this way: "It boils down to the difference in which the new generation of Muslims is constructing their Islamic identity," he says, "as opposed to the manner in which their parents have constructed their Islamic identity. And the significant difference is that the newer generation is struggling to accommodate their American-ness (saying): 'I am a Muslim. I am also an American.'"[13]

Participation: From the Margins to the Mainstream

Throughout most of their American experience, members of the Muslim community have refrained from fully engaging in civic society. This is now changing. American Muslims are moving from the margins to the mainstream. A number of national Muslim institutions have been created to address social, political and religious challenges.

While there continue to be differences within the community about full participation in society, the momentum and desire for more engagement is clear. A survey of Muslim leadership of mosques issued in April 2001 shows dramatic support (90 percent) for Muslim involvement in American institutions and participation in the political process.[14]

Khan credits what he terms "Muslim democrats" for overcoming isolationist impulses within the community and leading institutional and sociopolitical development toward greater participation. He says, "Muslim democrats were quick to grasp the significance of the American Constitution's guarantee of religious freedom . . . Over the last 30 years . . . Muslim democrats have campaigned to alter the way Muslims think about America and about Islam itself. They have fought for the legitimacy of their ideas against traditional scholars and battled against the siege mentality that had prevented Muslims from opening up and taking a fresh look at the world, and at their collective self."[15]

However, American Muslims face ongoing challenges as they seek to become engaged in wider society. They wonder if society is easing the way for them or raising the bar. Some are finding that as the community grows, so do barriers to its participation. "When you are a small number you are not a threat so it's very easy to be gracious," observes Esposito of Georgetown University. "It's when you become a significant number within a society that various elements . . . feel challenged. And I think this is what American Muslims are facing now . . . If Muslims are of a certain quantitative number, they become an alternative group

within the society that has potential clout . . . so the question for us is not only: How pluralistic are *they*—but how pluralistic are *we*?"[16]

"Islamaphobia"

Many American Muslims fear being involved will mean being misunderstood or, worse, becoming a victim of a campaign to demonize their religion or distort their views. Both Muslims and non-Muslims label the systematic distortion of Islam as "Islamaphobia," a fear of everything Islamic.[17]

Many feel this fear is encouraged by those who have promoted Islam as the new overriding threat to the West, replacing Communism in this post-Cold War era. Esposito has warned against falling prey to "easy accusations." He writes, "In understanding and responding to events in the Muslim world, we are again challenged to resist easy stereotypes and solutions. There is an easy path and a hard path. The easy path is to view Islam and Islamic revivalism as a threat—to posit a global pan-Islamic threat, monolithic in nature, a historic enemy whose faith and agenda are diametrically opposed to that of the West . . . The more difficult path is to move beyond facile stereotypes and readymade images and answers. Just as perceiving the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe through the prism of the 'Evil Empire' had its costs so too does the tendency of the government and the media to equate Islam and Islamic fundamentalism with radicalism, terrorism and anti-Westernism seriously hamper our understanding and condition our responses."[18]

Surveying the Muslim population in the Chicago area, reporter Stephen Franklin describes how many American Muslims are confused by the mixed messages American society seems to be sending them: "On one hand, [America] reaches out and implores them to become part of society. But at the same time it stereotypes them as religious fundamentalists and views many of their traditions as out of step with American culture and politics. Every violent act by militant Muslims anywhere in the world haunts them, forcing them into public and private denials that they are somehow linked to it. They live with the queasy feeling of being watched, and being judged differently from others." [19]

Salam Al-Marayati, executive director of the Muslim Political Action Committee, puts his feelings about the subject more bluntly: "When a Christian fundamentalist bombs an abortion clinic or kills a physician, it's an aberration. When a Muslim commits an act of violence, Islam is to blame."[20]

While politicians have generally shunned the Arab and Muslim communities, the tide is beginning to turn. "It was once the kiss of death to be involved with that community," Michigan Congressman David Bonior said recently. "Now a large number of people seek their support."[21]

A new generation of American Muslims is helping to overcome the obstacles to participation and blazing a trail toward greater engagement in society. Haddad, of Georgetown University, links their

activities and interests with developments on the world scene. He notes, "Their consciousness has been raised by CNN as they watched the Gulf War, the bombing of Iraq, ethnic cleansing in the Balkans, the unrest in the Middle East . . . [They] rely on the Internet to create a network of people committed to justice. They collaborate with existing organizations for human rights, minority rights, religious rights. These Arab and Muslim activists are mostly in their 20s and 30s, and they take American values seriously. They are working to create a better America."[22]

Sadia Warsi, Assistant Professor of Special Education, Education Department, Chicago State University, spoke of a redefinition of what it means to be Muslim in America, casting it in terms of community activism and social justice. "My generation of people define 'observant' [Muslims]," she says, "as people invol-ved in society, people who create social services, people who emulate the time of the Prophet in terms of what message he brought to his community. I think there is a new definition emer-ging, at least in my generation, where we are challenging 'observant' versus 'non-observant' from a perspective that is very American in many senses, but very Islamic if you look at early Islamic history."[23]

Other Challenges to Understanding

Imagery

Many Americans, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, believe another major barrier to greater understanding of Islam lies in the portrayal and images of Muslims in the media. Editor Greg Noakes, an American-Muslim commentator, observes, "For the most part, Amer-ican media coverage of Muslims and events in the Muslim world concentrates on the sensational . . . in the hunt for sensationalism the media pass over the exciting variety of interpretation and expression among Muslims who often profess very different ideas and attitudes while still remaining within the Islamic community."[24]

The negative image of Muslims has been reinforced for decades through movies and television. Author Jack Shaheen has documented thousands of examples. He writes, "Ever since cameras began cranking, Hollywood has produced…close to 1,000 movies which show Arab Muslims primarily as subhumans…much in the same way the Nazi cinema portrayed Jews not so many years ago…And what is disturbing about this particular image is that it's become so ingrained in American psyches, not only here but abroad since Hollywood movies go to more than 150 nations all over the world…And almost always in most of the films, the violence attributed to the Arab-Muslim male is linked to Islam."[25]

Religious scholar Karen Armstrong finds that the roots of negative imagery lie far deeper. "Ever since the Crusades," she notes, "the people of Western Christendom developed a stereotypical and distorted image of Islam, which they regarded as the enemy of civilization. The prejudice became entwined with European fantasies about Jews, the

other victims of the Crusaders, and often buried worry about the conduct of the Christians. It was, for example, during the Crusades, when it was Christians who had instigated a series of brutal holy wars against the Muslim world, that Islam was described by learned scholar-monks of Europe as an inherently violent and intolerant faith, which had only been able to establish itself by the sword. The myth of the supposed fanatical intolerance of Islam has become one of the received ideas of the West."[26]

Multi-Faith Conversations

As the Muslim community emerges, there is a growing interest on the part of Muslims, Christians and Jews to enter into dialogues of understanding based on shared beliefs and values. America's "children of Abraham" are making an effort to promote greater kinship across faiths.

These dialogues are still difficult and to date have been stymied by events overseas. Smith, of Hartford Seminary, a frequent participant in these conversations, describes the dynamics and the difficulties when it comes to facing issues related to the Middle East: "I suppose there are three ways to go about it," she says. "One is to attempt to talk about it and see if something can be done . . . we think we've got something everybody can agree to, and then, bingo, we realize that something is just raw and there can't be agreement and then the pain is great. Or sometimes you can try to avoid it, but that doesn't seem real either, and you really can't avoid it because it becomes bigger and bigger in people's consciousness. Or you can just get right out and argue about it and everything really falls apart. The situation is so very, very difficult and it's a major issue in Christian-Muslim-Jewish conversation in this country right now."[27]

There is a continuing interest on all sides to maintain these discussions for a variety of reasons. One Jewish commentator described it this way: "The goals of Jewish and Arab Muslim interaction should be to ensure that this debate takes place in a fashion worthy of the deep values shared by all sides. Efforts such as those by Jewish and Muslim groups in Los Angeles to agree to a 'code of conduct'—a jointly formulated document that affirms a basic civil partnership among all Americans without whitewashing differences of opinion—is surely a positive start. As the code states: 'While we may disagree, even passionately, on some important issues, we believe that dialogue on every issue should be conducted vigorously with civility and respect.' Moreover, the unfortunate proliferation of hate crimes and discrimination against ethnic minorities should be uniting Jewish, Arab and Muslim Americans."[28]

In Focus: The Immigrant-African-American Dialogue

The roots of the African-American experience with Islam stretch back more than a century. Over the years, Islam has offered dignity and self-esteem to African Americans as they fought against racial discrimination.[29] The African-American community's embrace of Islam also served as an inspiration to

many members of the early immigrant community who tended to downplay their religious identity.[30] Nevertheless, as Smith states, "Stories of immigrant and African-American Islam in this country were distinct and separate, and relations between blacks and immigrants were generally quite rare. Now, however, these stories are coming to be interrelated."[31]

In part, that is because more African Americans have embraced mainstream Sunni Islam represented by the American Muslim Mission and its leader, Imam Warith Deen Muhammad, who rejects racial segregation and black nationalism.

Despite their acceptance of mainstream Islam, many African Americans feel a growing sense of exclusion from the immigrant Muslim community. Overcoming this divide is an emerging challenge for the American Muslim community in its entirety.

African-American Muslim scholars such as Beverly Aminah McCloud, professor of religious studies at DePaul University, fault the immigrant community for falling short of meeting the Islamic ideals of equality. "There is no racism in Islam," she has said, "but there is plenty among Muslims."[32]

Illustrating her point, McCloud states, "It has been postulated that, for immigrants, there is a monolithic Islam in the Muslim world which is normative and the real experiences of African-American Muslims should be rejected; instead they should aspire to affect something called 'orthodox' Islam. This assertion continues in some quarters of the Muslim community as a stimulus to divisiveness."[33]

Smith and others recognize this challenge but also see a way forward. Writes Smith: "While most national Muslim organizations are predominately either immigrant or African American, and while there is still lingering resentment among some blacks that they are not directly included in the work of (organizations) . . . it is also true that a number of coordinating councils now include both immigrants and African American leaders in positions of leadership. There is no question that continuing efforts already underway to foster better appreciation, understanding and cooperation among the different groups that comprise American Islam is an issue extremely high on the agenda for Muslims in the United States."[34]

Imam W. Deen Mohammad, leader of the American Muslim Mission, acknowledges the struggle. "We're a family of people under God." But it is human nature "that we tend to group together." Muslims "have the same problem that the world has, trying to learn from each other."[35]

An American Islam

The United States is fertile ground for a deeper understanding of Islam in all its dimensions. Many have pointed to the influence that a more enlightened awareness of Islam can make not just in this country, but around the globe. As noted scholar Sulayman Nyang observes: "Islam in America now is safer than in its lands of origin. In America the cultural and economic systems are not threatened by

religious expression the way they are in many Muslim nations where the impulse of the power structure is to control Islam and manipulate it for political use. Here, Islam is free to be Islam."[36]

As Salam Al-Marayati further explains: "The American Muslim community is more affluent and educated than anywhere else. That will lead to greater development of Islamic thought here to a degree that I think in the future the Muslims of America will be influencing the leaders of Muslim nations more than the other way around."[37]

This is a particularly critical time as the American Muslim community continues to define what it means to be both American and Muslim in a 21st century context. Says Smith, "The coming decades will be critical as Muslims in the United States get clearer about who they are, what they need, and how they must organize to make their voices heard amid the competing claims of a diverse American society. Whatever patterns of religious, social and personal life develop, clearly they will have to represent both a continuity with the life and faith of the Prophet to his community and the emergence of a new entity with its own qualities and characteristics—a truly American Islam."[38]

To Know One Another

The terror of September 11 and its aftermath present unique challenges and opportunities for Islam in America. Immediately following the attack, Muslim leaders from throughout the country rushed to condemn the act and educate fellow citizens about the true teachings of Islam. Many echoed the views of Islamic scholar Hamza Yusuf, who branded the terrorists "enemies of Islam" and "mass murderers, pure and simple."[39] As more fellow citizens seek to gain a better understanding of the nation's fastest growing religion, many American Muslims have also identified the need for greater self-criticism as an emerging community challenge. "Muslims have to reject the discourse of anger…it's times like these that we really need to become introspective" declares Yusuf.[40]

The Qu'ran states that "God created nations and tribes that we might know one another." America is a nation of nations and a microcosm of the world. How "we might know one another," how pluralism works among ourselves and vis-à-vis the outside world will determine in large measure whether our country succeeds as a role model.

The journey towards understanding will take time. But America's Muslims are here to stay—the Muslim community is a part of the American fabric. As Corporation president Vartan Gregorian has said, "Tolerance is not enough—we need acceptance. Without understanding there's not going to be acceptance, and we have a long way to go."

In the end, this challenge is about more than Muslims moving further down the path of Americanization, it is also about our own nation moving further down the path of democracy.

[1] *The Mosque in America: A National Portrait*, Council of American Islamic Relations, April 26, 2001

[2] Yvonne Haddad, *The Muslims of America: A Demographic Overview*

[3] Jane Smith, *Islam in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p.181

[4] Shireen Hunter, "Islam in America" meeting at Carnegie Corporation of New York, June 28, 2001

[5] John Esposito, "Islam in America" meeting at Carnegie Corporation of New York, June 28, 2001

[6] Mohommed A. Muqtedar Khan, "Muslims and Identity Politics in America," *Muslims on the Americanization Path?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.91

[7] Jane Smith, *Islam in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p.66, p.187

[8] Ibid, p.22

[9] Ibid, p.178

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